

OPINION

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They Want to Execute This Guy?

A verdict in question

BY LORA MOYE

Troy Anthony Davis has become a symbol of what is wrong with the death penalty in the United States. He has faced three execution dates --- and could face a fourth --- despite the fact that very significant evidence pointing to his innocence has never had a hearing in open court.

With the tireless campaigning of human rights groups like Amnesty International, Davis' case has garnered national and even worldwide attention. Yet by the end of September, the United States Supreme Court will be deciding whether he lives or dies.

At the heart of our justice system is the concept of fairness --- including that everyone convicted of a crime has the chance to prove the verdict wrong.

Troy Davis has not been given that chance. He is an African-American man whose death sentence for the 1989 killing of a white police officer in Savannah, Ga., was based largely on the word of witnesses, many of whom now say they were coerced by police into

testifying against him.

In fact, seven of the nine state witnesses have now recanted or changed their testimony, and one of the remaining two witnesses has been identified by several others as the actual killer. No murder weapon was found, nor was there any other physical evidence linking Davis to the crime. Yet, in defiance of all common sense, our courts have refused time and time again to simply hold a hearing to determine the truth.

There can be no more egregious miscarriage of justice than the execution of an innocent man.

To be sure, all systems, including our own justice system, are imperfect. They are, after all, human institutions. The integrity of any justice system should not be measured by its inevitable errors, but by its ability to identify and correct those mistakes.

The importance of correcting mistakes is at its most profound and most obvious when an execution is at hand. There can be no more egregious miscarriage of justice than the execution of an innocent man.

Yet in this country, in this time, men like Troy Davis are often denied a fair chance to challenge their conviction and prove their innocence. Bureaucratic interpretations of arcane procedural rules prevent compelling evidence from ever getting a hearing, and the essential fairness of the justice system is sacrificed for the sake of "finality." Carrying out a death sentence has become more important than being sure the condemned is actually guilty.

Accompanying Davis' current petition before the Supreme Court is an amicus brief submitted by an impressive group of former judges and prosecutors, including prominent men like former U.S. Rep. Bob Barr, former Georgia Supreme Court Justice Norman Fletcher, former Deputy U.S. Attorney General Larry Thompson, and former FBI Director William Sessions. They state quite plainly, "The quality and quantity of the evidence raises the extraordinary likelihood that Mr. Davis is ac-

tually innocent."

But does that matter, when "finality" is at stake? The U.S. Supreme Court will have a chance to answer that question when it reconvenes on Sept. 29. In the past, when the Supreme Court has been asked to rule on whether it is constitutional to execute an innocent man, it has declined to do so.

Should the Supreme Court fail to step up to the plate, it will fall to the new district attorney for Chatham County --- the Georgia county where the crime was committed 20 years ago --- to do something. Appeals for him to re-investigate the case have so far met with silence, though given the way the state's case has fallen apart, this is surely what's needed.

Without a new investigation or an unlikely Supreme Court intervention, Troy Davis could be executed as early as mid-October, without ever getting a hearing on whether he is innocent. No matter how you feel about capital punishment, this should not be acceptable.

Laura Moye is director of Amnesty International's USA Death Penalty Abolition Campaign.

Right to Health Care

Consider the needs of the people

Editor's note: The following is from Oregon's Commissioners for Black Affairs comprised of Sen. Rod Monroe, Clifford Walker, Everette Rice, Jennifer Doncan, Phyllis Rand, Carlos Richard, Mariahm Stephenson, Frank Thompson, and Willie Woolfolk.

The greatest problem with today's health care system is the rising costs of health care, which has led to a large number of Americans left without coverage. It is a fundamental right of every American citizen to have universal access to quality health care.

We-the-people have suffered enough and have gone without for far too long. All members of Congress must consider the needs of the people who elected them and work with President Obama to pass a comprehensive health care reform bill.

President Obama has done his part by defining the requirements for real health care reform (reducing costs, guaranteeing choice, and ensuring quality care for all) and steadfastly providing three concrete solutions:

1. Reforming the health care system, which would expand coverage, improve quality, lower costs, honor patient

choice, and hold the insurance industry and companies accountable.

2. Promote scientific and technological advancement that would aid scientist in finding cures for the many chronic diseases plaguing American citizens, thereby increasing life spans, and decreasing suffering;

3. Improve and expand preventative care that would focus on health education, health screenings, and investing in electronic health record access and keeping.

Millions of Americans are expecting the new administration to push for these reforms, but the administration can't enact them without broad and vocal public support to convince a majority of Congressional legislators to demonstrate political courage and vote in true healthcare reform.

As a citizen you can help by making your voice heard. Call Sen. Ron Wyden at 202-224-5244, Sen. Jeff Merkley at 202-224-3753, the Senate switchboard at 202-224-3121, or the House switchboard at 202-225-3121 and insist that Congress pass meaningful health care reform in 2009.

Corruption Blocks Economic Recovery

Congressman's greed was not isolated

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

William Jefferson, a former Louisiana Congressman who represented parts of New Orleans, was convicted in federal court last week for accepting more than \$400,000 in bribes. Jefferson could be sentenced to more than 20 years in prison for his crimes.

Though it only took the jury five days to deliver the verdict, it will take tax payers much longer to pay off the trial's debt; a sum that includes far more than court costs.

The Gulf Coast has progressed slowly and steadily since it was hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. In New Orleans, however, many resi-

dents feel that more can --- and should --- be done. There are still nearly 66,000 unoccupied homes in the city, school enrollment is at 78 percent of its pre-Katrina levels, home sales are down 39 percent from four years ago and rents have increased by 40 percent in that same time period.

Charity Hospital, one of the city's largest state-run hospitals, was damaged heavily by Katrina. It has not reopened and it doesn't look it will. Many of the city's poor and elderly were able to receive free and low cost medical services there; they are now redirected to hospitals that are much farther from their homes.

Like the hospital, many local businesses --- dry cleaners, car repair shops and more --- didn't reopen after the storm, resulting in a lack of services to a city that has so much need. Most importantly, elected officials from the area still cannot definitively say whether or not New Orleans' levee system is strong enough to protect the city from a major hurricane.

Jefferson did not hold office when he was convicted --- he lost his seat in a December race, after he was indicted. But his corruption case is not an isolated one.

According to the FBI, Louisiana ranks third in the nation in public corruption cases. It's maddening to think that, in the midst of all that remains to be done in both the state of Louisiana and in the city of New Orleans, local politicians will abuse their power and ignore their constituent's needs in favor of fattening their pockets.

With Louisiana and New Orleans in particular struggling to rebuild itself nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina hit, the local government simply doesn't have the time or resources to continuously prosecute corrupt public officials. The state's attorney is doing his job by cracking down on corruption. The politicians need to step up and do their part by putting the needs of the people ahead of their own greed.

Judge Greg Mathis is vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Health Issues that Impact African American Women

Portland Community College Cascade Campus (Cafeteria area)

Date: August 15th, 2009
Time: 9:00 am- 3:30 pm

Free Door prizes and drawings for first 15 to register at the door

No Pre-Registration (FREE to the Public)

*Free Health Screenings, Vendors, & Mammogram Mobile Van appointments available.

9:00am - 10:00am
Registration / Continental Breakfast

9:50am -10:00am: Welcome - Marian Gilmore President, Portland Alumnae Chapter of DST

10:00 am - 11:00 am - Panel Discussion on Mental and Behavioral Health / Eliminate Stress for Success - Carol Chism LCSW, Leslie Gregory MSBS, PA-C, Susan Marie PhD, PMHNP

11:00am - 12:00pm
Health Inequity / "The State of Health Care for African American Women"
Dr. James Mason - Providence Health & Services / Tricia Tillman, MPH, Administrator Office of Multicultural Health

Lunch Keynotes:
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm
Staying Healthy / "Let's do it Right"
Dr. Nathalie Johnson

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Breast Cancer 101 / "African American Women Breast Cancer Awareness & Call to Action"
Gail Brownmiller - Susan G. Komen for the Cure Oregon and SW Washington Affiliate & Machell Dawson

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm
Financial Health / "A Penny Wise"
Floredid Walker, Financial Planning Strategist & Debbie Stone - PCC Women's Resource Ctr.

3:00 pm - 3:30 pm
Addressing Obesity / "Don't Super Size It"
Lashondra Lincoln

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Portland Community College-Cascade Campus Women's Resource Center

For More Information Contact Marilyn Boss at (503) 358-9621 or boss.marilyn@yahoo.com